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ABSTRACT

Although business organizations consider the financial and strategic implications of "downsizing" (a euphemism for what used to be called "layoffs"), they often neglect to consider the communication and human resource implications. Not only does downsizing affect the operational aspects of the restructured company, but also the interpersonal dynamics among the surviving organizational members. Generally, the academic literature on the impact of downsizing concentrates on three distinct stages: what to do before, during, and after the layoffs, but again, not on the communication implications of downsizing. The trade literature presents a different perspective on downsizing: it emphasizes downsizing as a process involving communication; it presents a more optimistic view than the academic literature; and it provides prescriptive means for individuals to handle the downsizing process. Given the lack of attention paid to downsizing, future research is warranted. In addition to access, other problems that arise when studying downsizing and its effects on the survivors are: (1) the organization's priority list; (2) the ability to study the entire process; (3) deciding upon what research methods to employ; (4) the financial constraints of the organization; and (5) the organization's culture. Research questions that can provide an initial attempt at addressing the communication implications of downsizing involve: centralization/span of control; formal and informal networks; superior-subordinate relations; feedback; communicating the downsizing process to survivors; socialization; effectiveness; and organizational integration. (Forty-six research questions are included; contains 68 references.) (RS)

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"Kiss Dagwood Bumstead Goodbye": A Communication Perspective on Downsizing

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"Kiss Dagwood Bumstead Goodbye":
A Communication Perspective on Downsizing

In the last decade, economic conditions have forced many organizations to begin "downsizing," "rightsizing," and "outsourcing"-- all current euphemisms for what used to be called "layoffs." Concurrent with the depressed economic conditions of the early 1980s and the leveraged buyout mania of the mid to late 1980s, many companies began permanent elimination of unnecessary personnel through "downsizing." Many thought downsizing would be a short-lived phenomenon. However, recent downsizing announcements by such major corporations as International Business Machines, General Electric, American Airlines, and General Motors (Ingrassia & White, 1992), have solidified the perception that "lean" firms are the desired model for successful business enterprises in America (Curtis, 1989). To achieve a new, trimmer shape, organizations have sought increasingly to shrink in size. Although organizations are very careful to consider the financial and strategic implications of downsizing, they often neglect to consider the communication and human resource implications. Not only does downsizing affect the operational aspects of the "restructured" company, but also the interpersonal dynamics among organization members who remain; the "survivors" (Brockner, 1988). The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of downsizing on the communication practices of organizational survivors. More specifically, this paper focuses on the similarities and differences in how the academic and trade literature address downsizing, as well as theoretical and practical issues for further examination.

Academic Literature

Practitioner-oriented publications have focused increasingly on the phenomenon of downsizing as wave after wave of reductions have hit America's workforce. The academic literature, on the other hand, has only begun to examine the impact of layoffs on those who remain; the "survivors" (Brockner, 1988) of downsizing. With the exception of the work of Joel Brockner and his colleagues (Brockner, 1988; 1990, 1992; Brockner, Grover, Reed, DeWitt, & O'Malley, 1987; Brockner, Grover, Reed, & DeWitt, 1992), very little research has been done on the impact downsizing has on survivors. Many researchers have noted this lack and have called for research into this important area (Curtis, 1989; Davy, Kinicki, and Scheck, 1991; McCune, Montagno, & Beatty, 1988; Sutton, Jucker, & Eisenhardt, 1986). Davy, et al. (1991) note that "the study of survivor responses to witnessing a layoff is an . . . important, yet generally neglected area of research" (p. 303). There are few actual empirical studies (for exceptions, see Brockner, 1988 and Brockner, et al., 1992); most information which does exist consists of theoretical works and case studies.

The existing research in the human resource area on downsizing and retrenchment has emphasized turnover, attitudinal measures, personnel issues related to measuring the financial and productivity aspects of human resources, as well as resource liquidation and asset reduction (Curtis, 1989). Earlier research on work force reductions has indicated that lower level workers are hit harder than the managerial ranks (Cameron, Kim, and Whetten, 1987), but recent downsizings have focused heavily on reducing the ranks of middle managers (Brockner, 1992). Research has not answered or examined many

questions, including identification of specific procedures that assure organizational survival following the retrenchment process (Curtis, 1989). The focus of the majority of the research has been on the layoff process itself, rather than on organizational coping following the layoff. There has also been a lack of research into the communication implications of the layoff process. Communication tends to be mentioned in passing as something that needs to be kept in mind.

Brockner's work has focused on the impact of the layoff process and how that process affects survivors' perceptions. He has concentrated on the "factors that affect the effects of layoffs on survivors' psychological states" (Brockner, 1988, p. 243) and the resulting impact on work behavior and attitudes. He has found that for the layoff survivors, perceived equity and the role of changing working conditions are critical factors in how the survivors react to the layoffs (Brockner, 1988). His work, as well as the earlier work of Greenhalgh (1983), suggests that layoffs cause the most anxiety and threat when they are perceived as unfair, unpredictable, and uncontrollable. Sutton and D'Aunno (1989) feel that layoffs are most threatening when perceived as unpredictable in timing, magnitude and duration.

Before the Layoff

Research has shown that if a downsizing is managed poorly it can have severe negative consequences for the future management of personnel (Brockner, 1988). "Managers' handling of layoffs will have a significant effect on the extent to which survivors exhibit *dysfunctional* work behaviors and/or attitudes" (p. 238). This is particularly true if the layoff is conducted in a manner inconsistent with the corporate culture, thus breaking the "psychological contract" (Brockner, 1992, p. 11) between the organization and the employee. Under these circumstances the survivors are more likely to see the layoff as unfair. Careful planning and execution of the layoff plan is critical to minimizing the negative consequences. If layoffs are mismanaged, "thereby hampering survivors' productivity and morale, then the organization stands to lose a sizable portion of the savings it hoped to achieve by introducing layoffs" (Brockner, 1992, p. 10).

Brockner (1992) suggests that organizations maximize the benefits of downsizing by assessing the following prior to implementation: 1)assure that the layoff is consistent with corporate strategy, not just a cost-cutting move; 2) assess the affect of the layoff on the company's culture; 3) give the employees plenty of notice; 4) target those survivors essential to the post-layoff company and secure their commitment; and 5) prepare managers who will be implementing the layoffs to deal with both the practical and emotional consequences. This should be done as fairly as possible with an eye toward the symbolic meaning of all aspects of the downsizing, which has a tremendous impact upon the survivors (Brockner, 1992), for it communicates how the company perceives its employees.

Managerial Response

Much of what management does during the layoff process itself has profound implications for how successful the efforts to minimize the negative effects for survivors will be (Brockner, 1988). Research has shown that when workforce reductions are due to a financial downturn, management tends to respond to the resulting crisis by: restricting information processing, including the increased use of standard operating procedures and job standardization; constriction of control, including centralization

and decreased autonomy of the workforce; and conservation of resources, including cost-cutting, justification of work, and less variety and skill in individual jobs (Sutton & D'Aunno, 1989). According to Curtis (1989), the typical administrative responses to reductions have been reactive and last-resort moves, which have led to increased centralization, formalization, and increased downward directives. These responses have tended to worsen the situation, especially for morale, trust, and productivity. In particular, the tendency toward centralization during cutbacks tends to worsen existing problems in communication, flexibility, and efficiency (also Behn, 1980; Cameron et al., 1987; Greenhalgh, 1982; & Krantz, 1985) that leads to even more uncertainty on the part of employees. Cameron, Kim, and Whetten (1987) argue that during organizational turbulence, management tends to centralize processes, focus on the short term, stick with known processes, and experience high turnover (especially of highly competent people). Brockner (1992) also notes that "perhaps the most interesting and managerially useful finding to emerge from several studies is that: if survivors felt that the *procedures* used to implement layoffs were fair . . . then the impact of more costly forms of caretaking (such as severance pay) on survivors' reactions was greatly reduced" (p. 22).

During the Layoff

During times of downsizing, survivors try to make sense out of events by talking to co-workers and supervisors, monitoring their peers' reactions to events for cues about their own thoughts and feelings (Brockner, 1992). As periods of upheaval continue and job insecurity remains high, workers focus on rumors instead of their jobs. In particular, if clear, accurate information about the company's future is not made available, rumors become the primary mode of communication and people find it difficult to attend to their jobs (Bargal, et al., 1992). In times of high uncertainty, survivors' information needs are particularly intense. This is a crucial time in determining whether survivors will perceive the layoff as equitable and necessary. This perception has a significant impact on the subsequent job performance of survivors (Brockner, 1988, 1990, 1992, Brockner et al., 1987, 1992). In general, the more information management provides, "including accounts of why it chose to lay off employees" (Brockner, 1990, p. 98), the more fair employees will perceive the layoff. If this process is mishandled, the company risks alienating its very best employees--those individuals most loyal to the organization (Brockner, et al., 1992).

The organization's communication with their employees can possibly increase or decrease the amount of stress due to job insecurity (Bargal, et al., 1992). "Clear and timely information regarding the extent, targets, and timing of potential layoffs could potentially minimize . . . or exacerbate the stress" (p. 57). In times of downsizing, survivors are particularly sensitive to the accounts the organization provides for why the layoffs are occurring, in order to make sense of what is going on (Brockner, 1988). People are especially sensitive to symbolic actions on the part of the organization. As one survivor of numerous waves of downsizings at a large corporation put it, "When you have just announced a massive number of layoffs is not the time for the company to sponsor a major golf tournament!"

In addition to how the process is handled, survivors' perceptions of fairness are inversely related to the closeness they have had with the laid-off workers (Brockner, 1992). If survivors and those laid off

worked closely together, the survivors may not work as hard following the layoff due to resentment toward management (Brockner, 1988). Survivors also often feel guilty when others have been laid off, but they have not (Brockner, 1988; Curtis, 1989; Sutton & D'Aunno, 1989). Part of peoples' dissatisfaction may result from a lack of opportunity for input into the decisions being made--an important factor since job satisfaction is higher when people have an opportunity for input (Davy, et al., 1991).

To work toward a stable layoff process, Brockner (1992) suggests the following: 1) give people "complete" information to avoid rumors and imagined outcomes; 2) make clear what information cannot be provided and why; 3) over communicate, using face-to-face communication when possible, using many channels, and repeating the information many times; 4) provide assistance to laid-off worker and make sure the survivors know of the assistance to their former co-workers; 5) handle the layoff details with "dignity" by showing care and sensitivity as to how, when, and what people are told; 6) managers should be accessible as possible to help people cope with the information (also Bargal et al., 1992); and 7) provide opportunities for transition ceremonies on company time as a sound investment in the survivors. See Sypher, Sypher, Housel, & Booth (1990) for an example of successful implementation of technological change that caused IBM to downsize their Lexington workforce. Krantz (1985) also suggests that managers be trained to help and allow employees to work through their grief and to express their emotions. Workers are struggling with a variety of conflicting emotions during the downsizing process. Bargal, et al. (1992) note that while laid off workers can move through the necessary grieving process and get on with their lives, insecure survivors often have no clear signals from within the workplace to guide them in assessing the stresses. They also lack the clear social support often available to the laid off worker.

After the Layoff

Before the layoff is implemented, plans for the post-layoff corporation should be carefully defined, assuring that the structure meets the strategic needs of the firm (Nelson, 1988). Survivors' level of productivity may affect the likelihood of a future layoff and, most likely, the future of the company (Greenhalgh, 1983). Survivors behavioral reactions to pressure may not be evident or predictable, but that does not mean there has not been significant impact upon the person's job satisfaction and organizational commitment; rather it may only mean that the consequences may not be immediately apparent (Brockner, 1988).

Because of stress and the uncertain atmosphere, survivors may be more rigid and less willing to take in and process new information (Greenhalgh, 1982; Sutton and D'Aunno, 1989) and are particularly likely to rely on the traditional or usual way of doing things. Yet the post-downsizing environment is often a completely new set of circumstances, precisely the type of environment that demands flexibility and rapid information processing. To be effective following the downsizing an organization must rethink both the work content and work processes (Nelson, 1988). The number of tasks people have to do tends to remain the same, or may increase, unless carefully examined, while the number of people available to do those tasks is less (Sutton and D'Aunno, 1989). Unless the organization is willing to alter

the amount of paperwork, rethink and stream-line decision-making channels, redefine jobs, and delegate authority, levels of acceptable work quality tend to decline as people are inundated with the volume and scope of the work at a time when they can least cope (Nelson, 1988). Nelson (1988) argues that the company needs to think through the implications of increasing the span of control if the supposed benefits of the downsizing are to be realized. "Reducing levels without an accurate idea of the limits of span is courting disaster" (p. 53). Unfortunately, a recent survey of 1005 corporations found that 86% had downsized within the last five years but only 42% had reevaluated and eliminated some of the amount of work employees had to do (Brockner, 1992). People reported that the "sheer volume" (p. 16) of work had increased and they were working longer hours and taking less vacation.

There have been varying ideas about how to explain whether employees work harder when under conditions of job insecurity and related stress (Brockner, 1988). Organizational consequences of job insecurity are known to be severe and include results such as decreased effort on the part of employees, an increased propensity to leave the job, and increased resistance to change (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). Recent research by Brockner and his colleagues (1992) has indicated a curvilinear relationship between job insecurity and work effort. They found that when people feel very worried about losing their jobs but feel they cannot do anything about it, they tend to "give up" trying and not exert much effort. Similarly, if they perceive no threat to their jobs and have a high degree of control over their work (it does not matter what they do), they tend not to exert as much effort. On the other hand, if they experience some job uncertainty but have a moderate amount of control (they feel they can do something about it), they tend to exert more effort. These seemingly contradictory findings could help explain the inconsistent results of previous research on job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984).

The changed working conditions following a downsizing can be a threat to survivors or an opportunity. According to Brockner (1992), job insecurity tends to be most severe when people perceive they have no control over the negative effects of the layoffs. They also tend to be uncertain of career path opportunities, since often there are no longer many (or any) jobs to be promoted to--another factor which impacts how survivors react. Yet for those who remain, there may be an increase in the intrinsic enjoyment of work as there can be greater autonomy and variety in the jobs that remain (Brockner, 1992).

To maximize the work efforts of the survivors Brockner (1992) recommends the following steps for the post-layoff environment be planned before the layoff: Give survivors a voice in creating the post-layoff environment. This may help restore some of the lost sense of control. Evaluate tasks and retain only those which are essential to the corporate strategy. "By eliminating low value work, the organization benefits in numerous ways, not the least of which is that survivors are less likely to feel overwhelmed by a workload that includes all of their previous responsibilities plus that of some of their recently departed co-workers" (p. 25). Look for ways to make peoples' jobs more interesting and creative as jobs are redesigned. Recognize that this may involve the need to provide necessary training. Publicize post-layoff opportunities. Provide ways for employees to have successful experiences to restore lost self-confidence.

As noted, most of the conclusions discussed have been drawn from theoretical works or case studies rather than empirical studies of the downsizing phenomenon and its effects on its survivors. The notable exception is Joel Brockner's work in which he has urged others to join him in researching the many variables which impact layoff survivors. He also emphasizes that even if layoffs are done in the best manner possible, survivors need a long recovery period to adapt to the layoff. "There is not quick fix." (Brockner, 1992, p. 27). He suggests that adjustment periods are best thought of in terms of years rather than months or weeks. Nelson (1988) also suggests that a successful management downsizing requires a significant investment in training, time, changed management systems, and a redirection of organizational roles.

Summary

In summary, the academic literature, mostly research conducted by Brockner and his colleagues, has focused on the impact of downsizing on the survivors in terms of how they handle the layoffs. Generally, the academic literature can be broken down into three distinct stages--what to do before, during, and after the layoffs. However, virtually none of the research focuses on the communication implications of downsizing and/or how to communicate with survivors and those being laid off during the process. When communication is addressed, the research either mentions it in passing or provides a global recommendation.

Trade Literature

While very little of the academic literature addressed downsizing and its impact on survivors, many of the trade publications have devoted substantial amounts of space to the topic. The trade literature sees "the successful companies of the 1990s" as "working and workable organizations"--that is, they will be flattened with fewer layers of management and managers will have wider spans of control. Most of the publications provide a "to do" list for management before, during, and after the downsizing to handle the fewer layers of management and increased spans of control. These "to do" lists contain more communication-related tasks than the academic literature. Also, in the trade literature, downsizing is viewed as an ongoing process; whereas, in the academic literature, it is often depicted as having distinct stages. What follows is a discussion of the downsizing process and the role of communication within that process.

Three premises about downsizing serve as a starting point for discussing the issue. First, downsizing organizations need to realize that this is a process and each decision has an impact on future options (Greiner, 1972). As Messmer states, "It is ironic that, at a time when U.S. businesses are eagerly embracing the total quality management (TQM) approach, many are undermining their own efforts through improperly planned and chaotic staff reductions" (1992, p. 23). Second, managers need to be aware of the misconceptions about change (change is unnatural, always disruptive, always progressive, always stressful, comes from crises, and indicates error in previous practices) (Clampitt, 1991), the fact that not all employees will embrace the change (Dentzer, 1992), and employee-centered techniques that might aid the change (Gooderham, 1991). Finally, most organizations devote the majority of their energy to those being laid off without realizing that they need to spend as much, if not more time, on the

concerns of survivors (Moskal, 1992). Organizations frequently tend to ignore survivors because the organization feels the survivors should be and are grateful to still have a job.

The trade literature's "to do" list consists of three main elements. First, the recession has caused many organizations to restructure and each must decide what restructuring plan is best. Second, organizations must develop a plan for who they will lay off, how the procedure will be announced, and what benefits will be provided to those being let go. Third, organizations must develop a program for explaining the current situation and future plans to survivors, helping them understand why they remain, and handling the problems that arise with those who remain. Stone (1991) summarizes it best--the key to successful downsizing is interpretation and communication of the process to: 1) heads of departments where the process will occur; 2) the downsized employees; and 3) the remaining employees. What follows is an explanation of each element and the role communication plays.

Restructuring

One of the most essential aspects of restructuring an organization is "improv[ing the] effectiveness and efficiency. . . . Layoffs eliminate people, not work" (Gooderham, 1991). While most organizations are concerned with bottom-line benefits of restructuring, they tend to ignore the costs that accompany reduced morale and productivity. However, restructuring does not have to be a painful process and can actually work to an organization's advantage if it is carefully planned and implemented. Gooderham (1991) recommends defining the measure of success and estimating the project (downsizing) costs. Therefore, a downsizing organization must determine what yardstick will be used to measure success after the layoffs--bottom-line profits, employee morale, or a combination of the two--and what costs are associated with the change--financial and emotional.

Generally, restructuring for a downsizing company means eliminating management layers first and subsequently, anything else that is seen as "fat." The elimination of management layers generally leads to an increased span of control. When restructuring and increasing the span of control, there are many decisions to make. Nienstedt and Wintermantel (1987) found a five-step restructuring process when they examined Motorola. Motorola gathered data via management, analyzed the organization chart options, discussed the costs and benefits of each, negotiated the goals to combat "You don't understand my position," and implemented and tracked the new structure. These steps are very similar to those used in small-group decision-making (e.g., Brilhart & Galanes, 1989) and are applicable to any organization, especially one initiating a downsizing; that is, considering restructuring. Specific decisions that must be made include: how big the span of control will be; how dispersed throughout the organization the manager's reach will be; how productive people under a particular span must be; and how several spans will be linked to join the company to its customers (McClenahen, 1988). Thus, it appears that downsizings and restructurings can produce teamwork as "a major key to effective organizations and productivity" (McClenahen, 1988, p. 44).

One implication of reducing management layers is thought to be improved communication (Dusky, 1991; McClelland & Wilmot, 1990; Skagen, 1992). According to McClelland and Wilmot (1990), most companies' press releases announce automatic improvements in communication processes as one

advantage of downsizing. However, the reality of the matter is that most survivors have found reshuffled work teams lead to less effective lateral, horizontal, or interdepartmental communication. Also, with the increased spans of control and fewer management layers that result from downsizing, there is an appearance of a smaller chain through which to pass information. The assumption is that a smaller chain means quicker and better upward and downward communication. Skagen (1992) summarizes it best as "information will travel much more freely and quickly" because survivors are more knowledgeable and more likely to ask questions (p. 2). Thus, after a downsizing, "Communication will be increasingly horizontal, across functions, and the traffic downward will be much heavier" (Skagen, 1992, p. 2). Finally, Moskal (1992) has a more realistic view when he states that the "level of communication should increase fivefold to tenfold in the aftermath of downsizing" and all survivors need to work toward that happening (p. 22). While increasing the level of communication sounds beneficial in theory, Moskal does not discuss whether he feels more communication is always better, how to achieve quality communication, and whether the increased communication should go both upward and downward.

Downsized Employees

Although those being let go, the downsized employees, are no longer going to be part of the company, the organization should treat them fairly, with respect and dignity. This statement sounds like the ideal situation and in today's fast-paced, "time is money" society, it sounds like a dream layoff. However, organizations are finding out that it is crucial to treat downsized employees fairly because of the impact on how the survivors view the organization. Downsizing organizations have employed severance pay and outplacement services for downsized employees to ease the loss. Recommendations for severance pay options include: 1) standardizing the basic severance pay policy; 2) frequently performing a legal and financial review of the severance policies to make them reflect the realities of the marketplace (Louchheim, 1991/1992). Although severance pay is helpful in the short-term, it neglects the long-term effects of being laid off. For the long-term, many companies are developing outplacement services in which the organization sets up training programs to aid the downsized employee in finding a new job. Some of the services or training programs include how to put together a resume, how to interview for a job, choosing the right job, and managing the time out of work. Organizations should encourage downsized employees to take part in these outplacement programs, both for the benefit of the downsized employee and the benefit of the survivors.

Two important considerations are the downsized employees and their needs, as well as how the actual process of downsizing occurs. Appelbaum (1991) presents a downsizing model that includes eight elements: 1) problem recognition and initial decision; 2) strategic planning; 3) alternative considerations; 4) preparatory actions; 5) specific action plans; 6) communication and implementation; 7) assistance to displaced persons; and 8) follow-up and rebuilding. What the model does not recognize is the need to consider survivors and the effect of strategic decisions, made as part of element two, on the remaining employees. On the other hand, Mullaney (1989) presents the critical elements of a downsizing as establishment of logical and workable action plans with appropriate accountability; good

communication among key parties; and commitment to a fiscal responsibility goal. Beilinson (1991) and Panos (1989) emphasize the importance of communicating the layoff to everyone because "no news is bad to everyone" and "some notice is necessary in order to provide time for the people who are leaving, as well as those who are staying, to get used to the change and to make plans to adapt." In short, all of the trade literature that discusses downsized employees and the downsizing process emphasizes the importance of communication and does very little to explain how this communication should take place and what specifically should be communicated.

Survivors

The general consensus is that survivors are being left out of the communication loop (Mallon, 1991) as well as being ignored before, during, and after the streamlining process (Moskal, 1992). A myth concerning survivors is that "they're so pleased they've survived that we don't have to worry about them. After all, they still have their jobs " (Moskal, 1992, p. 15). Downsizing organizations are not informing their survivors about what is happening, why it is happening, and what the future holds. Additionally, some organizations are not keeping managers adequately informed so that they can in turn inform the employees (Koonce, 1991). Finally, a downsized organization leans toward a democratic culture: "There will be a lot fewer Dagwood Bumsteads who shake in their boots when Mr. Dithers speaks" (Skagen, 1992, p. 2). What results is chaos within the workplace as well as potential morale and productivity problems because employees are uncertain as to what they can and cannot say as well as to whom they can and cannot express their feelings and thoughts. Thus, a new way of "managing" after a downsizing is warranted.

As is usually the case, much of the trade literature has a "to do" list for managing survivors and managing in downsized organizations. Tips for managers include:

1) not ducking the issues (that is do not deny that there is pain, anger, and hurt);
2) be honest and quick (know what needs to be done and get it done);
3) give full disclosure (answer questions and aim to communicate ten times more during stressful times);
4) pat survivors on the back (acknowledging their contributions goes a long way);
5) prepare supervisors and managers for the layoffs;
6) increase managerial accessibility;
7) solicit employees so they feel included and needed (cultivate a participatory process and eliminate low-value tasks because survivors cannot handle the same amount of work that was being completed in the organization before the downsizing; and
8) have the survivors work toward achievable goals (Moskal, 1992).

Other recommendations include organizing a cross-section of employees, and if possible, former employees, for an informal focus group to discuss how they feel the organization is communicating with them; make of list of employee suggestions; and continue to monitor the pulse of the organization (Mallon, 1991). Finally, some organizations are concerned with "turf battles" and ways to combat these are: 1) define jobs clearly; 2) remind people they are all on the same side; 3) let people know the

negative consequences of not sharing information; and 4) create a forum for airing grievances (Milite, 1992). These recommendations are intriguing and confusing because they make the assumption that all organizations are the same and will respond in a similar manner. Implementation recommendations are not clearly defined as well. None of the articles or recommendations takes into account that a particular organizational culture may not accept or respond to these recommendations.

In addition to the "to do" list, the trade literature discusses managerial styles. For example, downsized companies are beginning to look at management/leadership styles to determine what is consistent with the corporate culture, who is capable of developing short-term as well as long-term goals, and who can anticipate where "old" behaviors may crop up and know how to avoid them (Beam & Pines, 1992). Also, organizations are recognizing that managers need to be able to manage people as well as emotions. Managing emotions may be best handled by "managing by walking around" and talking to as well as listening to survivors and their concerns. In a downsized organization, emotions are likely to flair because of the fears survivors have and emotions which can no longer be contained. The grieving process needs to occur and managers must be equipped to handle and support grieving survivors (Moskal, 1992). In essence, survivors need managers who can communicate security, disseminate information, and provide personal attention (Rice & Dreilinger, 1991).

Finally, the trade literature emphasizes the role of communication in the downsizing process and the survivor mentality. Survivors have many opportunities available to them (being empowered to make decisions, being promoted to fill vacancies, and gaining experience earlier in their careers) and these opportunities must be communicated to the survivors as a way of reducing uncertainty and insecurity (Dusky, 1991). In a downsized organization, communicators can play a vital role by helping to improve lateral communication, communication between shifts and locations, awareness training and communication between survivors and new people entering work teams (McClelland & Wilmot, 1991). Also, those interested in communication may help promote "survival humor" to ease the tension and cope with the loss. Survival humor in an organization is similar to the political humor we hear when someone loses an election. In short, people adept at communicating have the potential to play a large role in the downsized organization throughout the process.

Summary

The trade literature provides a different perspective on the downsizing process. In the trade publications, there is an emphasis on looking at restructuring, laying off, and living with survivors as a process involving communication. Also, the trade literature presents a more optimistic view of downsizing than the academic literature. Third, the trade literature does provide some prescriptive means for individuals at all levels to handle the downsizing process. However, similar to the academic literature, there are many words which need to be more clearly defined. Most publications present "more effective communication," "a more productive work force," "open communication," and "better communication," to name a few, as benefits of downsizing. What they do not consider is that by not taking the time to define what constitutes "more," "better," "effective," and "productive," they are doing a great disservice to organization members who need to understand the process and possible pitfalls of

these outcomes. Also, by working in this manner, organizations are not providing themselves with the opportunity to learn from their past mistakes so that if future downsizings are necessary, they are essentially "reinventing the wheel" each time.

Research Problems

Given the lack of attention paid to downsizing and the communication implications of downsizing, future research is warranted. We are advocating research focusing on communication in the downsizing process or utilizing a communication perspective as well as research mutually beneficial to researchers and practitioners. Although downsizing is one type of organizational change, we do not feel that the change literature provides all of the necessary answers. At this point, not enough is known about downsizing to assess the similarities and differences between downsizing and other types of organizational change. What follows are some of the issues involved in conducting research on downsizing as well as areas and questions for future research on downsizing.

Many organizational researchers are familiar with some of the potential barriers to conducting research in an organization. Generally, access is difficult for those who are not established as researchers and/or do not have inside contacts at the upper hierarchical levels. Once an organization has granted a researcher access the next, and sometimes more difficult task, is gaining the cooperation of organizational members. What makes access an even more difficult issue during a downsizing is the upheaval within the organization. Both the organization and its members fear the change taking place within the organization and question whether they will survive the process. Because members fear they may not remain in the organization, they may be reluctant to disclose unhappiness, problems they see in the organization, and/or dissatisfaction with any of the current policies or procedures. In addition to access, other problems that arise when one wants to study organizational downsizing and its effects on survivors include: 1) the organization's priority list; 2) the ability to study the entire process; 3) deciding upon what research methods to employ; 4) the financial constraints of the organization; and 5) the organization's culture.

First, when an organization is undergoing a downsizing, it tends to utilize crisis management and thus, the normal functional patterns are no longer operative. A crisis mentality provokes/produces a focus on the short-term and preoccupation with functional issues. In a crisis environment, granting access to researchers and/or an examination of the process tends to be low on management's priority list. Management is generally more concerned with ensuring that the necessary products are produced or services are provided. In short, the long-term benefits of having someone examine the process so that effective and/or ineffective actions can be identified for future downsizings or crises are ignored. Given the trend toward multiple downsizings in organizations, the researcher sees an urgent need for thoughtful, empirical examination of downsizing as it occurs.

Second, even if an organization recognizes the need for careful analysis, a researcher has a difficult time studying the ongoing downsizing process. Although many organizations know for some time before a downsizing is going to occur, a researcher has a difficult time being able to enter the

organization and study those first meetings where a majority of the critical decisions are made, such as "is there a need for the organization to downsize." Thus, any researcher must examine at least the beginning stages of the downsizing in retrospect. Retrospective accounts can be subject to distortion due to organizational members' perceptual bias, social desirability, and the social construction of reality. Most of the research conducted on downsizing has looked at the whole process in retrospect. In short, the researcher sees an urgent need for research concurrent with the process rather than a retrospective account to maximize the benefits of examining the downsizing process.

Third, related to the difficulty of studying the entire process is a problem with available research methods. Not every researcher has the luxury of becoming a participant observer where information not otherwise available, such as actual conversations, may be obtained. Also, direct observation may not be an option because of the observer's intrusive nature. For example, someone who wishes to examine the decision-making process by observing meetings may be denied that opportunity because competitive "trade secrets" might be revealed. If a researcher chooses interviewing as a technique, the possibility of non-cooperation by organization members exists. As noted, survey methods have been the methodology of choice to this point. However, just as there are some perspectives provided through surveys, other perspectives are ignored or minimized. In short, each method has its strengths and weaknesses and an ideal research strategy would combine multiple methods (Brewer & Hunter, 1989) to maximize the benefits for the organization and researcher.

Fourth, regardless of what technique a researcher chooses, there are financial costs for the organization. When the downsizing is due to financial difficulties, pressure exists to assure that each employee achieves maximum productivity. Management may express reluctance to allow subordinates to participate in what may be seen as a nonproductive activity which does not contribute to bottom-line profits. To this point, we have discussed researchers with the assumption that they are looking at the organization as academic researchers and not as paid consultants. However, if one were to include consultants within the definition of researchers, the management would need assurance that the services being provided more than outweighed the monetary outlay. In short, both time and money are financial issues which downsizing organizations place at the top of their priority lists.

Finally, the organization's culture (see Deetz, 1982), has an impact on whether the organization sees the "costs" associated with research as a financial burden, as an arrow manager would, or an interpersonal benefit, as a circuit manager would (Clampitt, 1991). Some organizations value knowledge as well as intangibles which may not appear on a balance sheet or income statement, and thus, these organizations are more likely to foster and encourage research. On the other hand, some cultures see knowledge and research as foreign to their operations because they cannot be tied concretely to the bottom line. Still other organizations recognize that communication is one of the primary modes of attaining their mission and are most interested in how they can better communicate with their employees to achieve that mission. Thus, they are interested in research that will provide answers on how to communicate more effectively with their employees. In short, each organization is unique and although researchers sometimes try to study all organizations in a similar manner, one must realize the

implementation of the corporate philosophy or mission impacts what research opportunities may present themselves.

Future Research and Practitioner Implications

The academic and trade literature review have revealed a dearth of attention being paid to downsizing in organizations. Additionally, with the exception of Brockner and his colleagues, very few researchers are examining seriously those who remain after a downsizing, the survivors. Thus, almost anyone interested in organizational research, and particularly organizational communication research, has many opportunities available to her or him. That is, the majority of research either mentions communication in passing or provides a global view of communication and none examines downsizing from a communication perspective. What follows are possible avenues for future research concerning the impact of downsizing on the communication among organizational survivors and how practitioners can utilize these research findings. The research questions provide only an initial, not exhaustive, attempt at addressing the myriad of possible communication implications of downsizing on the survivors. As discussed earlier, operationalization of terms is a continuing problem--that is, studies frequently operationalize their terms differently--and this problem needs to be addressed and resolved in each of these areas as part of the ongoing research program.

Centralization/Span of Control

While the academic literature indicates that organizations centralize decision-making and constrict control in times of crisis (Curtis, 1989; Sutton & D'Aunno, 1989), the trade literature (e.g., Panos, 1989) and Brockner (1992) contend that a downsized organization should decentralize and grant workers greater decision-making autonomy. What actually occurs in organizations and what the literature recommends conflict. Additionally, companies tend to revert back to "the rules," or a standard operating procedure, which may no longer be applicable in the downsized organization. Accompanying these trends toward centralization and rule-governance is the increase in downward communication, an absence of accurate information, and the reduction of flexibility. Thus, future research needs to examine the options available to organizations and the criteria by which the company can assess the strategy best for them. Such research will provide practitioners with much needed assistance in developing guidelines appropriate for their organization. Researchers interested in this area of downsizing may address any or all of the following questions.

RQ 1: How does centralized decision-making, resources, and information flow affect communication among employees?

RQ 2: How, if at all, does a centralized organization develop or re-develop a climate of "trust and commitment"?

RQ 3: What are the differences in the rules of an organization that chooses a centralized versus a decentralized structure?

RQ 4: How do organizations decide to become centralized or decentralized after a downsizing effort and what is the impact of that decision upon the communication of job descriptions to, flexibility for, autonomy of, and accurate information flow among survivors?

RQ 5: How do survivors view a centralized versus a decentralized decision after a downsizing?

With a reduction in the number of management layers, downsizing has led to the increased span of control, one manager supervising an increasing number of employees. There are limitations of time and energy which restrict a manager's ability to interact with individual employees. An increasing span of control forces a redefinition of the supervisory role. Also, many employees have become accustomed to one-on-one interactions and the consequences of overloading managers to the point where this is no longer feasible must be considered. Increased spans of control will lead either to a decrease in communication, an increase in impersonal communication, or a redefinition of communication between managers and those supervised. Thus, future research needs to examine the communication implications of an increased span of control. Such research will provide practitioners with much needed assistance in determining an optimal span of control for their organization as well as how to cope with increased spans of control. Researchers interested in this area of downsizing may address any or all of the following questions.

RQ 6: What criteria do supervisors with an increased span of control use to determine how they are going to communicate information?

RQ 7: How is the role of a supervisor being redefined and communicated in a downsized organization?

RQ 8: What channels of communication are used by managers with increased spans of control? Which channels do managers and employees see as most effective?

Formal and Informal Networks

As organizations strip away employee layers, there is a disruption of the previously existing formal and informal networks of communication. The disruption necessitates the creation of new communication networks and a redefinition of people's roles within the network. With creation and redefinition comes the need to communicate these changes to employees. Issues such as the types of information passed through each network, horizontal communication (inter-departmental) and upward-downward communication must be considered because there will be a relationship between those who survive and the impact of each of these issues upon them. For example, some survivors and the organization may have a tendency to communicate the need for restricted information while others may have a tendency to share information. The tension created by these different perspectives and how this tension affects the information flow need to be examined. Finally, as with any change, the level of trust among organization members is impacted by the process and the manner in which it is conducted. The level of trust and commitment will affect the survivor's selection of and belief in the channel and/or network used to communicate. Thus, future research needs to examine the communication implications of changed communication networks and channels. Such research will provide practitioners with much needed guidance in the planning and implementation of a reconfigured communication structure as well as some insight into the survivors' perceptions of the importance of and belief in the various channels and networks. Researchers interested in this area of downsizing may address any or all of the following questions.

RQ 9: How are new information networks created and communicated when there is an elimination of personnel?

RQ 10: Are survivors more likely to share or hoard information and what impact does this have upon the organization's effectiveness?

RQ 11: How do organization members determine who will play what roles within the communication networks and how are these roles communicated to members?

RQ 12: How does the survivor's level of trust impact their perception of communication networks and channels?

Superior-Subordinate Relations

Much of the trade literature tends toward a redefinition of superior-subordinate relations as employee-centered, participative management. In essence, they lean toward more of a team approach where positions and titles are secondary to completing the task and accomplishing the goal. However, if the organization were operating from a team approach prior to the downsizing, then survivors need to re-form teams, recognizing the difficulty of asking employees to recreate close working bonds. Many employees will have lost those to whom they were closest in their prior work teams and may be reluctant to form new bonds because of a fear that new team members will be part of the next downsizing. Also, those viewed as superiors, or those who were superiors prior to the downsizing, need to help survivors manage the grieving process and deal with the implications of losing coworkers and/or friends. Finally, some organizations may choose to keep a hierarchy intact and thus, need to know how leadership and followership are defined in the restructured organization. Thus, future research needs to examine the effects of downsizing on the communication between "superiors" and "subordinates." Such research will provide practitioners with much needed assistance in determining whether training is needed for "superiors," how to foster and encourage a team atmosphere, and guidelines for determining managerial potential. Researchers interested in this area of downsizing may address any or all of the following questions.

RQ 13: How do organizations decide whether to adopt an employee-centered, participative approach?

RQ 14: What types of management strategies are downsized organizations utilizing? How effective do employees see these strategies?

RQ 15: How satisfied are survivors with the communication between them and their "superiors"?

RQ 16: What processes do downsized organizations utilize to reform teams and how are these processes communicated to team members?

RQ 17: What criteria are organizations using to identify potential leaders and followers in a post-downsized environment?

Feedback

In the often chaotic, post-downsized environment, formal channels and methods of performance feedback are often no longer operative. In the ideal one-on-one superior-subordinate relationship, feedback is exchanged (goes both ways) on a daily basis. However, with the restructuring of roles and

increased spans of control, there is a need to reevaluate the feasibility of continuing this ideal. Additionally, there is a need to reevaluate and redefine the formal feedback system, including the criteria for performance feedback, the standards against which employees are being evaluated, and the types of feedback members receive (positive, negative, or none). Once organizations decide what the criteria for performance are, these criteria must be communicated to organizational members through an appropriate and non-threatening channel. Organizations also struggle with a positive bias--a particularly prevalent problem in downsized organizations where people are fearful of the repercussions of making negative comments. Thus, future research needs to examine the changing role and implementation of feedback in a downsized organization. Such research will provide practitioners with much needed assistance in determining what types of feedback are most appreciated by survivors, possible standards (action versus effort) for performance criteria, and guidelines for providing feedback to survivors. Researchers interested in this area of downsizing may address any or all of the following questions.

RQ 18: To what extent do downsized organizations utilize formal performance appraisal feedback and the day-to-day interactional feedback?

RQ 19: From what sources do survivors receive feedback?

RQ 20: What feedback messages are communicated to survivors?

RQ 21: How are new, downsized feedback standards communicated to survivors?

RQ 22: Who determines what the new standards for performance are and how are these new standards determined?

RQ 23: How is both positive and negative performance feedback fostered and encouraged in a downsized team atmosphere?

RQ 24: What are the perceptions of survivors concerning to whom they can provide feedback? That is, do they feel comfortable providing feedback to new team members, superiors, etc.?

Communicating the Downsizing Process to Survivors

Unlike many of the areas we have discussed, Brockner and his colleagues (e.g., Brockner, 1992; Brockner, et al., 1992) have focused their attention on how important the manner in which the downsizing process is handled impacts survivors' perceptions. Their previous research has revealed the importance of treating downsized employees and survivors equitably (adequate notification, outplacement services, explored alternatives to layoffs, and treated with respect and dignity). However, a communication perspective has not been employed in examining equity issues or the process of communicating the downsizing. Issues meriting more attention include how survivors' jobs are redefined and how these new job descriptions are communicated to the employees, how accessible managers are when survivors need to communicate with them, and how all survivors handle the transition, including the "grieving process." Additionally, knowing and understanding that they are needed and appreciated is important to survivors. Kouzes and Posner (1989) have ten practices for leaders, which include inspiring a shared vision, challenging the current process (taking risks, which is exactly what a downsizing is), fostering collaboration, planning small wins, and celebrating accomplishments. Each of these has a place in a downsized organization and could prove beneficial to

survivors. Also, practices such at those mentioned above may help reduce job insecurity (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984) and promote a caring attitude by the organization. Finally, the organization needs to examine the process of communicating the downsizing to both an internal and external audience. The process of communicating a downsizing is similar to what is done in crisis management (e.g., Benoit & Lindsey, 1987)--choosing the proper channel, timing, and message appropriateness. Thus, future research needs to examine how the downsizing is communicated to internal and external audiences. Such research will provide practitioners with much needed assistance in determining guidelines for communicating a downsizing and communicating with the survivors after the downsized employees have left. Researchers interested in this area of downsizing may address any or all of the following questions.

RQ 25: How do organizations redefine job responsibilities following a downsizing and how are these new job descriptions communicated to the survivors?

RQ 26: How accessible are managers following a downsizing and what, if any, are more appropriate topics to discuss with managers?

RQ 27: How do survivors explain the downsizing to those around them and what types of grieving processes do survivors employ (e.g., group discussions of the downsizing process)?

RQ 28: What steps do organizations and managers take to ensure that survivors feel wanted, needed, and appreciated? That is, how is organizational support communicated to the survivors? What types of events do organizations plan to foster cohesion among survivors and how are these events perceived by the survivors?

RQ 29: How do organizations balance and communicate both the caring (support) and fair (equity) attitudes of the organization?

RQ 30: What channels and messages are used to convey a downsizing to the external or public audience?

Socialization

In addition to communicating the downsizing process, organizations must socialize their survivors into the new organizational structure. A downsized organization can be as foreign to someone who has worked there for many years as it is to someone setting foot inside the doors for the first time. Intra-organizational transfer of personnel is likely in a downsized organization and those being transferred need to be socialized into the new work teams or departments. Additionally, once the downsizing has occurred, new employees will have to be hired eventually and how their socialization occurs is another area for exploration. One of the gaps in the socialization literature is a focus on when do newcomers feel they have made the transition and are now an insider to the group or organization. Also, there has been little attention paid to the socialization of managers and no attention paid to the socialization of new team leaders (Hartley, 1992). The organization must combat the possible side-effects of socialization which include conveying "old" rules, negative aspects of the downsizing, and emotional baggage. Finally, those doing the socializing must have enough information to articulate clearly the organization's mission, rules, job definition, performance criteria, and rationale for the downsizing.

Thus, future research needs to examine how downsized organizations socialize their survivors and eventual newcomers. Such research will provide practitioners with much needed assistance in creating orientation programs and how to communicate clearly "the way things are supposed to work around here." Researchers interested in this area of downsizing may address any or all of the following questions.

RQ 31: How are survivors socialized into the downsized organization?

RQ 32: How is the socialization process different for someone who comes to a work team from another division of the organization and someone who comes from another department of the organization?

RQ 33: When do newcomers to the downsized organization feel they have become insiders in the organization and how is this sense of belonging communicated to them?

RQ 34: What similarities and differences exist between the way new managers or new team leaders and employees are socialized?

RQ 35: What types of stories are told to new organization members and how consistent are these stories with the "new" rules, positive aspects of the organization, and the emotional rewards of the organization?

RQ 36: How do organization members obtain the information needed to socialize new employees and the skills to clearly present the information?

Effectiveness

As an organization undertakes a downsizing, it makes the implicit assumption that is will be "more effective" once the process is completed. Research needs to examine whether downsized organizations are indeed more effective, productive, and efficient as well as have better communication. There has been no examination of whether this is a valid assumption and/or what conditions need to be present for its validation. Also, constituencies change with a downsizing and their conflicting values and goals must be considered (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977; Cameron & Whetten, 1983). Downsized organizations need to consider both their long-term and short-term goals (Cameron & Whetten, 1983) and definitions of effectiveness in the long and short term (Denison & Mishra, 1989). One means of establishing goals is through a mission statement. Additionally, a mission statement which is implemented in the organization has the potential to ameliorate the uncertainty (Farace, et al., 1978) survivors experience during and immediately after the downsizing. Finally, researchers need to examine both organizational and communication effectiveness because not all effective organizations have members who communicate effectively and not all effective communicators work for effective organizations. Thus, future research needs to examine how downsized organizations define and communicate effectiveness to the survivors. Such research will provide practitioners with much needed assistance in assuring that activity is targeted toward meeting the long- and short-term goals of the organization as well as providing alternative ways of defining effectiveness. Researchers interested in this area of downsizing may address any or all of the following questions.

RQ 37: How do organizations define effectiveness after a downsizing and how is this definition communicated to employees?

RQ 38: How do organizations define better communication and what conditions need to be present for the communication to be perceived as better by the survivors? Also, is there any truth the claim that downsized organizations are more effective, productive, and efficient?

RQ 39: How do organizations define their constituencies after a downsizing and how do organizations respond to the conflicting values of multiple constituencies?

RQ 40: How do organizations develop short-term and long-term goals and definitions of effectiveness and how are these conveyed to survivors?

RQ 41: What is the relationship between organizational effectiveness and communication effectiveness of individuals? What factors influence these two types of effectiveness?

Organizational Integration

One challenge the downsized organization faces is being able to integrate the individual's needs with the organization's goals. Although the ideal situation would be integrating the organization's goals with the employee's needs, this rarely occurs and researchers must accept the differences between theory and reality. To examine how well the survivors are integrated into the organization, one may examine the congruence of perceived values between top management and coworkers. It is important to understand whether survivors and top management agree upon what is valued and rewarded within the organization so that all are working toward the same ends and are being rewarded for achieving the organizational priorities (Kilmann, 1984). Some, including Weiner (1988), have tied studying organizational culture and shared values. The values that members bring to the organization as well as those the organization holds work together to create the organization's culture. In a downsized organization, the culture is recreated and maintained through the values which are shared among the members. However, if members expect one course of action and the organization breaks the psychological contract, then the ramifications for survivors tend to be much more severe due to the sense of betrayal. In essence, the culture of the organization constrains the actions it may take to handle the whole downsizing process. During downsizing, organization members may be involved in the decision-making process, which allows them to feel as if they play a role in the future of the organization and help recreate the organization's culture. Thus, future research needs to examine how downsized organizations communicate their shared culture and how this culture is recreated and maintained following a downsizing. Such research will provide practitioners with much needed assistance in better understanding methods for integrating individual and organizational needs and goals. Researchers interested in this area of downsizing may address any or all of the following questions.

RQ 42: How do organizations define organizational goals and employee needs and how do the two interact in the mission statement and effectiveness definition of the downsized organization?

RQ 43: What do survivors view as the values of top management and to what extent are these values congruent with what their coworkers value?

RQ 44: To what extent are survivors consistently being rewarded for achieving the organization's goals? To what extent are the rewards consistent with what the survivors expect and desire?

RQ 45: How are organizational cultures created and recreated by the survivors of the downsized organization?

RQ 46: How is the culture of the downsized organization communicated to the survivors?

Conclusion

This paper sought to explore the literature associated with the impact of communication on the survivors of a downsized organization. We found that very little of the academic literature focused on downsizing and virtually none addressed the communication issues of downsizing and its effects on survivors. The academic literature focused on issues of job insecurity and the process of downsizing an organization has on survivors. On the other hand, the trade literature focused much more of its attention on the downsizing process and the role communication has in making downsized organizations more effective, efficient, and flexible. However, they tended to offer a broad, prescriptive "to do" list that has not been tested or has been tested on an ad hoc basis. Finally, the paper provided a preliminary set of research questions for those interested in the relationship between communication and various aspects of a downsized organization, particularly the communication with and by survivors.

Downsizing is a new phenomenon that has only recently begun to be examined. Thus, it is important to note that what is provided here is very preliminary and based upon research in other arenas as well as speculation about avenues for possible downsizing research. Future research on downsizing has many alternatives and researchers and practitioners have much to offer each other if they are both willing to examine downsizing as a process that occurs over time.

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